

The grace that holds us

Bible reference for sermon: Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

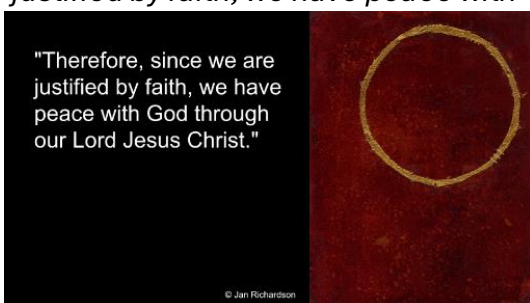
There are some Sundays when a Scripture reading seems to arrive at exactly the right moment. This is one of those Sundays.

This week our congregation received difficult news. One of our beloved members has received a cancer diagnosis, and this on top of the reality that their spouse has already been diagnosed with stage 4 incurable cancer. Many of us are carrying heavy hearts. We are worried. We are wondering what lies ahead for them, for their family, and for our church community.

News like this has a way of stopping us in our tracks. It reminds us how fragile life is. It reminds us that despite all our plans and hopes, much remains beyond our control. And in moments like this, we find ourselves asking questions that lie deep within the human heart.

Where is God in all of this? How do we keep going when the future feels uncertain? What hope do we have when suffering comes close to home?

Into these questions, Paul speaks these remarkable words: *"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*



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Paul doesn't begin with what we must do, but with what God has already done. He doesn't say, "If your faith is strong enough, you will have peace." He doesn't say, "If you understand everything that is happening, you will have peace." He doesn't say, "If life turns out the way you hope, then you will have peace." He says, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace

with God." This peace is not something we earn. It's not something we create. It's God's gift to us through Jesus Christ. And perhaps that is something we need to hear today.

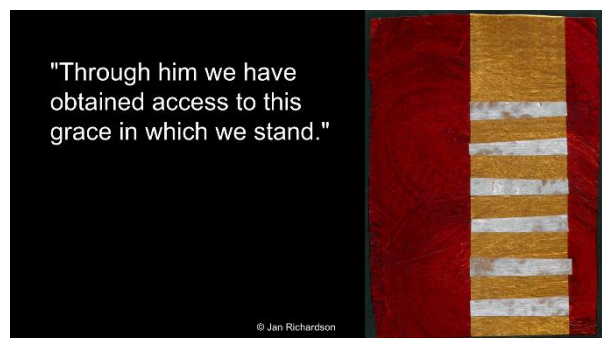
Because when serious illness enters our lives, there is so much we cannot control. We cannot control the diagnosis. We cannot control the future. We cannot remove the grief of those we love. But we can cling to what God has already done for us in Christ.

Peace is more than a feeling; it is the deep reality of a restored relationship with God. When we hear the word peace, we often think about calmness or serenity. But Paul is talking about something much deeper. He is speaking about peace with God. Through sin, humanity became estranged from God. We turned away from the One who created us and loves us.

Yet God refused to abandon us. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God reconciled us to himself. The hostility is ended. The barrier is removed. The relationship is restored. This means that whatever happens in the days ahead, nothing stands between us and God. Not illness. Not fear. Not uncertainty. Not even death itself.

That is why Paul can say: *"Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand."*

What a beautiful image. Paul says that grace is not simply something God gives. Grace is where we stand. We live in grace. We are surrounded by grace. We are sustained by grace.



Even when life feels unstable, grace remains our foundation. Martin Luther loved this truth. Again and again, he reminded Christians that our confidence does not rest upon the strength of our faith but upon the faithfulness of Christ. And that is such good news. Especially when we feel weak. Especially when we are frightened. Especially when we do not know what tomorrow will bring. Because our security rests not in ourselves but in Christ.

The hope Paul speaks about is not wishful thinking about the future, but confidence in God's promises. In everyday conversation, hope often sounds uncertain. "I hope it won't rain." "I hope things improve." "I hope everything works out." But Christian hope is something different. Christian hope is confidence that the God who has acted in Christ will complete the work he has begun.

The future Paul speaks about is not merely a better version of this life. It is the promise of resurrection. It is the promise that death will not have the final word. It is the promise that one day every tear will be wiped away. It is the promise that Christ will make all things new. And that hope matters deeply when we receive news like we have received this week. As Christians, we do not deny the reality of illness. Nor do we face it without hope. The person we love is held in God's hands today. They will be held in God's hands tomorrow. And they will be held in God's hands for all eternity. That is our hope. Not wishful thinking. Not optimism. But confidence in the promises of God.



Finding hope in the midst of suffering is one of the hardest parts of the Christian life. Of all weeks, this may be the part of Paul's words that is hardest to hear. Paul writes:

"We also boast in our sufferings."

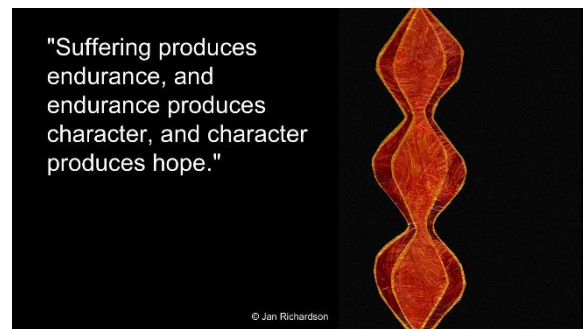
None of us would choose suffering. None of us would choose cancer. None of us would choose the tears and uncertainty that accompany such news. So what does Paul mean? He certainly does not mean that suffering is good.

He is not suggesting that we should celebrate pain. Nor is he asking us to pretend that everything is fine. The tears shed this week are holy tears. They are signs of love. They are signs that someone matters deeply to us. Paul is not glorifying suffering. He is proclaiming that suffering does not separate us from God. Even here, God is present. Even here, Christ walks beside us. Even here, the Holy Spirit is at work.

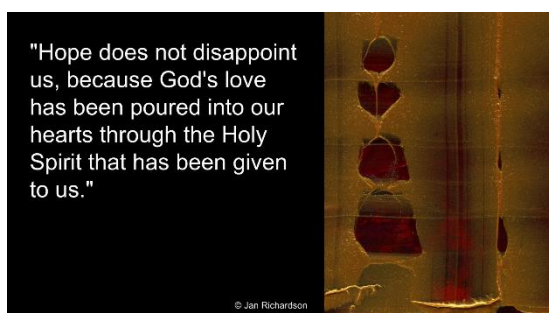
Paul writes:

"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

This is not a formula. It is a testimony. Paul himself knew suffering. He knew rejection, persecution, imprisonment, and hardship. Yet he had discovered that God's grace remained present through it all.



Many of us have seen this in our own lives. Perhaps we have watched someone face illness with extraordinary courage. Perhaps we have seen families hold one another together through grief. Perhaps we have witnessed Christians whose faith has become deeper and more compassionate because of what they have endured. The suffering itself was not good. But God's grace was. And God's grace can accomplish remarkable things even in the darkest circumstances.



Hope does not disappoint because it is grounded not in our circumstances but in the unchanging love of God. Paul continues:

"Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

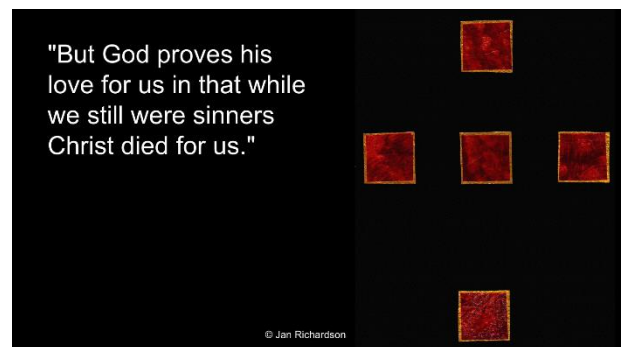
Notice the abundance of the image. God's love is not measured out carefully. It is poured out. Lavishly. Generously. Without limit. The Holy Spirit continually reminds us that we belong to Christ. When we feel overwhelmed, the Spirit intercedes for us. When words fail, the Spirit prays for us. When faith feels fragile, the Spirit sustains us. And because God's love has been poured

into our hearts, hope does not disappoint. Not because every prayer is answered as we wish. Not because every illness is cured. Not because every sorrow is removed. But because God's love remains steadfast. Nothing can separate us from that love. Not suffering. Not fear. Not cancer. Not death. Nothing.

The proof of God's love is not found in our circumstances but in the cross of Christ. When serious illness comes, many questions arise. We may wonder why this has happened. We may wonder why now. We may wonder what lies ahead. But the cross answers one question beyond all doubt: "Does God love me?"

The answer is yes. The cross is God's eternal declaration of love. Not because we deserve it. Not because we have earned it. But because God is gracious. Paul writes: *"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."*

Christ died for us while we were still weak. While we were still sinners. While we were incapable of saving ourselves. Christ died for us. That means God's love is not dependent on our strength. It is not dependent on our health. It is not dependent on our circumstances. It rests entirely upon the grace of God. And that love remains unchanged whether we are strong or weak, healthy or ill.



Walking together in hope is one of the gifts God gives to the church in times like these. Today we gather as a congregation trusting that God is with us. We do not have all the answers. We do not know what the future will bring. We cannot take away the pain of those we love. But we do not walk this road alone. God has given us one another. We can pray together. We can support one another. We can sit in silence together. We can bear one another's burdens. We can remind one another of God's promises when our own faith feels fragile. And through it all we cling to the promises of Christ: That we have peace with God. That we stand in grace. That hope does not disappoint. That God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And that nothing—not even death itself—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. For whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord. And that promise is enough. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>